

# Concord has echoes of history

By Marvin Pave  
Globe Staff

CONCORD—Two hundred years ago this month, the Provincial Congress sat here in the First Parish Meeting House to prepare a list of grievances against the British government.

Yesterday afternoon, with the glare of television lights outshining the Colonial-style chandeliers in the historic church, questions were again raised concerning the government of the United States.

The occasion was the National Town Meeting, moderated by former New York Times associate editor Harrison Salisbury. The hour-long program featured former Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus, and historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

So, everything was done town meeting style, as questions and opinions were solicited among the 300 people who jammed the Meeting House, including program guests Thomas Winship, editor of The Globe, and publisher William Rusher of the National Review.

The program will be broadcast Wednesday at 10 p.m. on WGBH-TV, Channel 2.

The topic was "Whatever Happened to the American Dream?" and the town meeting setting was appropriate because the church — located in historic Concord Center — was the site of the settlement's earliest town meetings.

"The dream is still there," said Ruckelshaus, who along with former Attorney General Elliot Richardson, resigned in protest last Oct. 21 over the firing of special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox by former President Nixon.

"But we must do two things to keep it going," Ruckelshaus said. "First, we need systemic changes in order to give more people a piece of the action. We must diffuse the power of the central government in that regard."

"Second, we should realize that the nature of our problems today is much more complicated than in the past, and we must foster a greater awareness that we live in an interdependent world."

Schlesinger, an adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and Professor of humanities at City University of New York, said that "our pride has been in our ability to change. In recent times, we have been subjected to a series of shocks — Vietnam, assassinations, resignations of our President and Vice President, and energy, crime and in-



Harrison Salisbury, formerly of the New York Times, addresses members of National Town Meeting in Concord. (Globe photo by George Rizer)

flationary problems. Our confidence has been shaken.

"Yet, I wonder if historians of the future will look back and regard this era not just as one of turbulence, but of the beginning of the American people to act on the lessons they have learned."

The role of American business, the problems of youth, the moral fiber of the American civilization, and an expanded role of the town meeting process were among the related subjects raised from the audience.

"I don't think we should aspire towards the moral leadership of the world," Schlesinger replied. "We should desire it, of course, in our own society. Otherwise, we are held up as judge, jury and executioner by the rest of the world."

"And that," he said, "can be painful, as the Vietnam War will attest."

A concern of one town resident, who alluded to the unresolved colonial grievances of 200 years ago, was: "Do high government officials really listen to what the public has to say?"

"My own experience with Mr. Cox's firing dictates an answer of yes," said Ruckelshaus, now in private law practice in Washington. Mr. Nixon was forced to replace Mr. Cox because the people demanded it

through the media and through telegrams. I had an unlisted telephone number last October, but I received about 4000 telegrams protesting the firing."

The concerns and frustrations of the young were reflected in the remarks of a Concord School Committee member who said he feared that idealism among youth is waning.

"Unfortunately," replied Schlesinger, "one of the misfortunes of the young is that they desire instant remedies."

"Who knows? The American dream may never be fulfilled, supposing that there is an American dream at all. But what we must keep in mind, young or old, are the valuable steps we take in trying to reach those remedies."

Future sessions of the National Town Meeting will be held in Philadelphia's Congress Hall, the Illinois State Legislature, where Abraham Lincoln served, and in Atlanta, Berkeley, and Washington.

The programs will be carried every Wednesday by Channel 2 and every Saturday at noon on WBUR-FM.

The television debates are sponsored by the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington. The format calls for public officials and newsmakers to present their views before a live audience and then answer questions.